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My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

By Teresa Nesbitt

My bookshelf is a caved-in microwave box. It's definitely not the prettiest book storage solution, but after years of moving from state to state, it's helped me control the mad, rabbit-like proliferation of books in my life. No matter how many books manage to appear in the corners of my apartment, at the end of the day I'll only keep as many as I can jam into that box.

The survivors of this microwave box battle royale range from my much-abused, much-loved copy of *The Phantom Tollbooth* to my most recent favorite - Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*. The line-up hasn't changed much over the past few years, even through several moves around Florida and Georgia. I have a creeping feeling, though, that my next move - whenever that may be - is going to involve some tooth-gnashing and hair-pulling before I figure out which books will inevitably end up in the donation pile.

The problem stems from the used bookstore just up the road in Zebulon, Georgia. I have yet to walk into that store without emerging with an armful of books. It's hard to resist a place with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, squishy ottomans, and stacks of \$3.00 sci-fi. As a result, a steady tide of newcomers is building on my nightstand, kitchen table, bathroom sink, and between couch cushions. I'm tripping over new books stacked around the house, and I'm starting to think it may be time to add another microwave box to the mix. So, in tribute to A Novel Experience - that most dangerous of bookstores - I'd like to take you on a tour of those books making it so hard for me to say goodbye.

I axed my collection of sci-fi and fantasy books after my first move, boxing up my Mercedes

Lackeys, Garth Nixes and Brian Jacques and leaving them with the public library. Recently, though, I've been looking to rebuild, with an eye on sci-fi classics. Whenever a Philip K. Dick washes up on the shelves, I grab it. Considering so many of his books are out of print, I consider myself lucky to have found just the one - *Now Wait for Last Year*. Featuring some pulpy, Atlas-Shrugged-esque cover art with a giant torso and bloodshot, glaring eye, the tagline reads "ONLY ONE MAN COULD SAVE THE WORLD, AND HE WAS DEAD - AGAIN." How could anyone resist a teaser like that? The book itself is as melodramatic as advertised, delivering soapy family turmoil amidst an alien war.

I've also stumbled across some classic science fiction by accident, finding Walker Percy's *Love in the Ruins* while looking for more along the lines of his coming-of-age story, *The Moviegoer*. Instead of another tormented Southerner trying to find meaning in his mundane surroundings, I found myself with a tormented Southerner dealing with an apocalypse of his own creation.

On the flipside of this equation, I've also picked up books I expected to feature sci-fi or fantasy elements, only to find myself with a historical war novel. I chose the wrong book to jump into the collective works of prolific fantasy author Michael Moorcock, going (again) for the one with the fanciest cover without ever reading the back. *The Brothel in Rosenstrasse* follows the wandering mind of an old man as he recalls his experience of the Second World War, blocking out the horrors of the world in the Rosenstrasse red light district. While featuring an escapist as its main character, there is not a stitch of fantasy to be found in this book - a bleak reflection on the effects of war.

Equally bleak, but far more fantastical - a ratty, dog-eared copy of *A Game of Thrones* found its way into my hands through A Novel Experience as well. Reading *Game of Thrones* has been like a marathon race against the inevitable tide of spoilers lurking online, and I'm 100% certain that the next four books in the series will soon add to the glut of books in my house. *The Hunger Games* trilogy hasn't helped matters either - after finishing the last page of *Catching Fire*, I immediately got in my car, drove twenty miles to the bookstore, and dropped money on a hardback copy of *Mockingjay*.

I foolishly bought the first book in another series, as well, lured in by the stack of Stephen Kings buried in the horror and mystery section. *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger* currently sits on my nightstand, and will be the next up to bat once I finish the last few pages of *Game of Thrones*.

This sampling is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to my book hoarding problems. Some

non-fiction has found its way into my home, including Tony Horowitz's *Confederates in the Attic* and Steven Levitt's *Super Freakonomics*. I've reconnected with some of my middle school favorites, like *Jane Eyre* and the fast-food fiction of Victoria Holt. There's even been a stab at practicality with the addition of some cookbooks to my kitchen shelves.

An obvious solution to my book mobility issues would be a Kindle, but - if you couldn't already tell - I'm a sucker for the yellowing, inked-up, dog-eared pages of used books. I love the hideous, eye-searing color schemes of books published in the seventies, the prim fonts of the fifties, and the grandiose, apocalyptic cover art of classic science fiction. While I've already tagged some books for the donation pile, I'm becoming increasingly reluctant to let go of my books. It may be time for me to buy an actual bookcase.

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